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ABSTRACT

An elementary school teacher designed and implemented a program intended to reduce excessive absenteeism among first grade public school students. The program consisted of four basic parts: (1) perusal of attendance cards and grade books prior to treatment; (2) implementaton of treatment; (3) post-perusal of attendance cards and grade books; and (4) tabulation of results. Students in the treatment group participated in a program designed to reduce absenteeism through the implementation of a high incentive program involving parents and students that lasted for 10 weeks. The intervention involved distribution of a "Welcome Back" sticker intended to establish rapport with students receiving the treatment; establishment of rapport with a comparison group of students in another first grade class; discussion of the importance of daily class attendance; a math lesson on counting absences from attendance cards; and a language lesson concerning ways in which students could arrive at school on time on a daily basis. As a result of the intervention, students in the treatment group increased in attendance up to 90 percent or more and received grades of C or higher during the treatment period. Appendices provide a sample attendance card, a table illustrating pre- and post-intervention results, and a dissemination package. (RH)

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"REDUCING EXCESSIVE ABSENTEEISM AMONG FIRST GRADE PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS"

by

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464-78-1375

A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of the Center
for the Advancement of Education of
NOVA University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Educational Specialist.

June/1984

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The writer designed and implemented a model program to reduce excessive absenteeism among first grade public school classes. The program's goals were to promote better class attendance and incentive opportunity for better learning achievement.

The program consisted of four basic parts: perusal of attendance cards and grade books prior to treatment, implementation of the treatment, post-perusal of attendance cards and grade books, and tabulation of results.

After perusal of attendance cards and grade books, the students in the treatment group were subjected to an intense program to reduce excessive absenteeism in first grade public school classes by implementing a high incentive program involving both parents and students during a ten week implementation period from March through May. At the conclusion of the implementation period, a post-tabulation of attendance cards and grades were made and the results were compared. Students in the treatment group increased in attendance up to 90% or better and the grades for the treatment group were C's or better for the implementation period. (Appendices include a sample attendance card, table illustrating pre and post results, and a dissemination package)

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Reducing Excessive Absenteeism

Among First Grade Public School Students

Jeanice J. Doty

NOVA University

Running head: REDUCING ABSENTEEISM

Reducing Excessive Absenteeism

Among First Grade Public School Students

Purpose

The setting for this practicum was a public school in the southern part of Florida. The students specifically involved were located in two first grade classrooms. There were twenty seven pupils enrolled in each of these two first grade classrooms. There was one teacher for each of the two classes. The writer was one of the two teachers involved in conducting this action oriented project. The other teacher was of the same ethnic background as the writer and conducted her class along the same balanced curriculum guidelines.

The students in the writer's classroom were an ethnic composite of:

Black	3
White	11
Hispanic	12
Asian	1
	27

Four of the Hispanic students had a family social history of following the Migrant Trail on a yearly basis. It was a projected hypothesis that at some point between the months of March and June the writer would receive a notice of withdrawal for those particular four students. However, that hypothesis did not

materialize. The four students remained through the month of May.

The other first grade classroom involved in this practicum also had a total enrollment of twenty seven students. The ethnic composite was as follows:

Black	6
White	10
Hispanic	9
Asian	2
	27

Two of the Hispanic students had a family social history of following the Migrant Trail on a yearly basis. The teacher of the class had verbally indicated to the writer that she expected the two students to withdraw during the month of May. It was a pleasant surprise to the teacher that the two students in question remained through the complete month of May.

Whether the total of six students withdrew from the class was only a projected hypothesis and would have been dealt with only if the withdrawal had become a fact. It was noteworthy information and helped the reader to better understand the composite structure of the two first grade classes involved.

There were no known physical handicaps or infectious diseases in either of the student enrollment structures of the two classes. The writer could fully appreciate the profoundness of such a

statement since the writer's class has just completed in late February a "round robin," so as to speak, of chicken pox.

It was at this point in classroom structure stability that the writer chose to design and to implement a high incentive involvement program to reduce excessive absenteeism among the writer's first grade students. The writer was fully aware that such influencing variables as chicken pox and withdrawal due to parent involvement in the migratory work movement could not necessarily be changed, but it was the excessive absenteeism without such compelling reasons that the writer addressed in this practicum.

The identified problem in the writer's first grade classroom was that 30 percent (9 pupils) of the total student enrollment of twenty seven had been absent for an average of eight days or more during the second nine weeks grading period from November seventh to January twenty fifth. The excessive absenteeism continued into the third nine weeks instructional period. The absence rate per child due to chicken pox was three to five days.

It was noted by the writer in each case when the absentee returned to school that his/her grades dropped extremely and many of the teaching objectives had to be redirected toward the returned absentees. It was also noteworthy that, indirectly, poor self-esteem seemed to be a secondary characteristic of the returned absentees. For example, two of the students who had been absent ten consecutive days were very reticent and did not seem to want to

join in with the other students in activities at the interest centers or even at outdoor play. At first, the writer thought that perhaps they were not feeling well, but after talking to them, the fact that they did not feel wanted by the other students because they had been gone during the time frame in which many of the social clusters were being formed, was a heart-rending experience to watch. As a concerned teacher, the writer conducted a "Feelings Time" session as a part of the content unit on "I Am Important." The session brought out many other students who had felt "left out" upon being a returned absentee. It was at that point that the writer determined to design and to implement a program to reduce excessive absenteeism among first grade public school students. The writer fully understood that the action oriented project would not alleviate all feelings of depression or loneliness due to absenteeism, but it was the intent of the writer to promote an incentive program correlated with the students and their parents to provide opportunity for better learning achievement and higher self-esteem.

The other first grade class was for data analysis purposes termed as the "control group" class because the writer was only going to render a "treatment" upon the first grade students in the writer's class. The "treatment" was the incentive program. The other class had no special program treatment other than the visiting teacher who was required to follow up on extended

absences. It was by having a treatment group and a separate control group that a comparative outcome was assessed. This will be further discussed in the results section of the practicum.

The expected outcomes of the action oriented project were:

1. Over a period of ten weeks, the students in the treatment group would increase over-all class attendance to 90% of the total student enrollment. Increase was measured by observation of class attendance cards.

2. During the ten week implementation period, grades for the previously untreated absentee students in the treatment class would be no lower than a C average. Improvement was measured by perusal of the class grade book.

3. At the end of ten weeks, the treatment group would demonstrate a more positive attitude toward sharing in a small group activity as evidenced by teacher observations of individual and small group social behavior.

Research

The writer perused the relevant educational literature concerning absenteeism and how other professionals had selected to combat such a problem that was relevant to every classroom teacher. In surveying the literature, it soon became apparent that each author had decided to approach the subject with as much tenacity as resources would allow. The studies most closely related to the writer's approach or methodology were as follows:

Needels and Stallings (1975) conducted a study that explored the relationship between classroom instructional processes and the average number of student absences in first and third grades. The data were collected in a total of 166 classrooms as part of the Follow Through Planned Variation Program. The Classroom Observation Instrument, developed by Stanford Research Institute, was used to record classroom activities and instructional methods. Since the data were correlational, causal effects could not be attributed to the instructional processes. However, the results showed 56 variables for first grade and 65 for third grade to be significantly correlated with absence rate after adjusting for baseline achievement scores. Children in both first and third grades seemed to be absent less in classrooms where there was a higher degree of child independence, child questioning, adult response, individualized instruction, and open-ended questions and where children and adults showed more positive affect. Child absences appeared to be more frequent in classrooms where children often worked in large groups, where adults used direct questions in academic work, and where corrective feedback was used frequently.

Milton Kirby (1969) from the Brownsville, Texas Consolidated School District conducted a study in which first grade students from families with common ethnic, social, and economic characteristics were studied to determine the effects of parent participation in the Adult Basic Education Program on the

attendance and achievement of the children. The experimental group was composed of 160 children from low income, Spanish-speaking families in which at least one parent had participated in the Adult Basic Education Program (ABE) conducted by the Brownsville Consolidated Independent School District. A control group of 160 children was selected from families in which neither parent had participated in the ABE program. Findings of the study showed that the attendance rate of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group during the 1967-68 school year, and that the experimental group attained a higher average score on a standard achievement test than did the control group. Results of a limited supplementary investigation indicated that the ABE program may have a beneficial effect on job performance and social, civic, and economic activities of participants.

The study that the writer found to be most clearly related to the implementation project was a study done by Lincoln and Boloz (1981). Ganado Primary School on the Navajo Reservation implemented an attendance improvement plan which provided encouraging results. Implementation of the attendance improvement plan was initiated after reviewing the 1980 attendance registers which indicated the average length of enrollment had been 169 days with students averaging eleven days of absences. An attendance task force was formed to study the problem and to recommend possible solutions for improvement. Recommendations includes: identifying

high risk students and interviewing their parents to determine their perception of the importance of attending school; undertaking a district-wide effort to reduce factors contributing to frequent absenteeism; and implementing a positive program. The program was designed to recognize both individual and class groups for outstanding attendance records which included a monthly invitation to a special movie; in nine weeks receiving a ribbon of recognition; and for the year presented with a "Canado Attendance Star" T-shirt and a certificate at an assembly. At the end of the first year of the attendance program, 22% of the student body accounted for 40% of all absences averaging nine absences per year and by the end of the third year absences ranged from 3.9% to 2.5%.

The writer investigated the prevalence of absenteeism in Dade County Public Schools. According to Area Office information, absenteeism in Dade County Public Schools was not a pressing county-wide problem per se. It has been a sporadic problem in a number of Dade County Schools, but "any" absenteeism was not to be encouraged.

Absenteeism was a definite problem in the writer's classroom and it was imperative that a strong incentive program be undertaken to acquaint and to involve both students and parents in a united effort to reduce excessive absenteeism and promote incentive opportunity for better learning achievement.

The statistical data analysis design for the writer's practicum approach was a quasi-experimental design. Since the students were already assigned to two first grade classrooms, it was not feasible to randomly assign students to the treatment class. Consequently, the writer chose to select a non-equivalent control group design as follows:

treatment class	O X O	O - Observation of recording of attendance and grades
	-----	
control class	O O	X - treatment strategy
		O - post observation of recording of attendance and grades

Method

The writer chose to conduct a "treatment" method as follows:

1. Established a positive rapport with returned absentees by distributing a "Welcome Back" sticker. The cost was minimal. The sticker could be easily made from construction paper and a piece of tape. Markers were used to draw a smiling face.

2. Explained to the "treatment" group that the writer was working with the whole class to help them do better in their daily work assignments.

3. Discussed the importance of attendance daily in the classroom. Presented a creative drama given by older students (3rd or 4th graders) that demonstrated what it was like to return

to school and not be able to just pick up and understand all the information missed in math and reading concepts. The student could not learn what he/she was not there to learn.

4. Conducted a math lesson in counting absences from the attendance cards and a language experience on how students could consistently arrive at school on time and on a daily basis.

5. Established rapport with the control group class and explained to them that the writer was going to count their absences daily and at the end of ten weeks their absentee and grade records would be compared to that of the treatment class.

The treatment group was told that they were going to be compared in attendance and grades to another first grade class, but the other class was not identified by teacher name. This was to promote the spirit of incentive competition.

Another component to the writer's method was to contact each student's parents and to acquaint them with the need for parent support and involvement to reduce absenteeism. It was suggested that a classroom Fair Day could be planned and conducted by the parents who had students with 90% attendance and no grade lower than a C at the end of the ten week implementation period. The parents were asked to encourage their children to make independent projects that were displayed at school on Fair Day. Socialization skills were utilized and observed during the classroom preparation process for the culminating Fair Day activity.

The students were daily encouraged to attend class, to successfully complete daily work assignments, and to demonstrate appropriate social skills by a classroom progress chart entitled "I Am Important." The chart was displayed on the classroom wall and briefly discussed noting progress or regression as the ten week implementation period progressed. Weekly progress reports were sent home to parents indicating each individual student's progress in grades and attendance, as well as personal and social attitudes and work habits.

The writer chose to design the personal approach method because no matter how many variations or times it was utilized, it always took into consideration the unique individual make-up of each child and each classroom make-up of ethnicity. Parent involvement was determined to a large extent by high incentives to help their children learn and achieve.

Solution strategy was only successful when it contained the unique ingredients that the writer chose to emphasize with both students and parents--rapport with high personal incentive motivation. The monetary cost was minimal. Most activities for implementation were teacher and/or student made. Fair Day was a composite of daily written work assignments and special projects. Each student and parent participant were awarded the "I Am Special" certificate of merit drawn and prepared by each individual student, as well as a "Good Foods" treat from the culminating activity of the content unit on "Health and Nutrition" Booth.

The solution method was successful because the students and parents cared. The one variable that would have been detrimental to the writer's success for this practicum experience would have been "apathy." Each student and parent demonstrated concern and put forth the effort to promote better attendance and grade averages, or no amount of rapport or counseling could have succeeded.

A summary of the implementation activities were as follows:

1. Established rapport with both treatment and control group classes.

2. Made "welcome back" stickers.

3. Observed and recorded attendance and grades for both control and treatment groups. This was an "initial" observation and recording of informative data.

For Treatment Class:

4. Discussed and used creative drama to emphasize the importance of daily attendance and learning achievement.

5. Incorporated parent involvement through instituting a classroom "Fair Day" as part of an incentive program to involve students and their parents.

6. Constructed a class progress chart to visibly show individual and/or group progression.

7. Correlated attendance and grade data at mid-point of implementation time period to facilitate any correctional adjustments that might have been needed in the implementation method.

8. Sent weekly progress reports home to parents to inform them of their child's progress.

9. Encouraged parent involvement in planning for "Fair Day" activities.

10. Stimulated high incentive motivational development through creation of special display project for Fair Day. For example, a student brought a pet cat that was used as a motivational subject for a language experience project.

11. Designed invitations to parents, directed construction of certificates of merit and planned "good food" menu for healthy foods booth for "Fair Day."

12. Observed and recorded attendance and grade data for evaluation of implementation period.

13. Emulated proper socialisation skills to be utilised during Fair Day and in all individual and small group activities.

Each of the implementation activities received a positive and enthusiastic response. Both students and parents in the treatment class demonstrated willingness to participate. The writer was really surprised that no negative responses were voiced.

During the ten week implementation period, the writer interspersed the activities so that no one particular activity received more emphasis than another. Every activity was introduced and executed as a major component of the implementation method.

Results

The control class teacher and the writer performed the evaluation procedure to assess the success or failure of the action oriented project.

The tools for evaluation were the attendance records and the grade book records of both the control group and the treatment class. The attendance cards for both classes were compared and correlated to see if there was any increase or decrease in attendance. All absentee excuse notes were compared to peruse reasons for any lack of attendance. Sickness was noted, but not tabulated as a negative trait for either class. The grade books for both classes were tabulated and compared to see if attendance seemed to be a determining factor in increased learning achievement. Attendance and grades were tabulated only for the pre-implementation period, during the implementation, and post-implementation time frames for the purpose of this practicum.

Success or failure of the treatment to produce results were readily visible to the observer just by perusing the attendance and grade book records for the implementation time frame.

The impact on the treatment or target group was very positive because they met the objective goals of 90% attendance and no grade lower than a C.

"Success" for the treatment group was depicted by an increase in over-all class attendance to 90% of the total student enrollment.

Increase was measured by observation of class attendance cards. "Success" was also achieved when grades for the previously untreated absentee students in the treatment class were no lower than a C average. Improvement was measured by perusal of the class grade book. An important measure of "success" was achieved when the treatment group demonstrated a more positive attitude toward sharing in a small group activity as evidenced by teacher observations of individual and small group social behavior.

The comparison of attendance cards from the initial observation to the post-observation showed a definite rate of increase in attendance. (see Appendix B) The objective goal of 90% attendance was achieved.

When the grade books for both classes were tabulated, the students who achieved 90% attendance or higher were also the students whose grades were a C or better in the grade book. (see Appendix B)

Socialization skills were positive during the implementation period as evidenced by an agreeable attitude toward sharing in a small group activity. This was observed by the teacher during the implementation period when making observations of individual and small group social behavior.

The control group class, who had no treatment other than the visiting teacher visits as a follow-up on excessive and/or extensive absences, had no visible grade or attendance increases as evidenced by perusal of the class attendance cards and grade

book. The returned absentee did not show any evidence of desiring to raise grades or stay in school regularly. The writer kept in daily contact with the control class teacher and it was through conversations with her that the writer was able to glean information on attitudes of returned absentees in the control group class.

At the end of the implementation period, the writer and the control class teacher tabulated and compared the results between the pre-and-post-treatment times and the control class attendance and grades. (See Appendix B) The control class attendance and grades were not placed in the table results because the teacher asked that they not be graphically displayed in the practicum final report. As a professional, the writer must honor the request. However, the reader could readily see after careful perusal of the table graph in Appendix B that the treatment was a success in the writer's classroom. The results after treatment were readily visible. The writer was well pleased with the attendance and grade increases made by the children. With motivational stimulus, they performed a job well done.

Recommendations

As a result of the practicum experience, informational data was disseminated to interested professionals by means of a field service component. This component was designed to facilitate dissemination of the essential elements of the practicum to others

in the same field as the writer's degree major. It was packaged as an appendix that was part of the practicum report. (See Appendix C)

Because of successful completion of the practicum experience, the writer has chosen to continue to build upon the motivational building block concept to stimulate continued daily attendance and to encourage a steady growth in learning achievement.

It is noteworthy that the control class teacher was so impressed with the final results that she plans to implement a similar program next year, if her class begins to show excessive absenteeism.

Annotated References

Bolos, Sigmund A., & Lincoln, D. C. (1982). Combating student absenteeism; strategies for raising attendance and achievement. Research in Education, 14-24.

Intended as an attendance improvement plan formulated and implemented on a Navajo Reservation. Describes the formation of an attendance task force and their recommendations of possible solutions for improvement. Contains a very positive self-image concept presentation of procedures.

Kirby, Milton J. (1969). A study to compare the scholastic attendance and the scholastic achievement of first grade students. Research in Education, 39-42.

Comprehensive study performed on first grade students from families with common ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds to determine the effects of parent participation in an Adult Basic Education Program on the attendance and achievement of the children. Provides insight into external ramifications of certain parents being more of a motivational stimulus for achievement of their children than other parents.

Needels, Margaret & Stallings, J. (1975). Classroom processes related to absence rate. Research in Education, 10-15.

Exploration of the relationship between classroom instructional processes and the average number of student absences in first and third grades. It contains excerpts of the Classroom Observation Instrument developed by Stanford Research Institute.

Sample Attendance Card Used in Dade County Public Schools

SCHOOL NO	I.D. NUMBER	STUDENT'S LAST NAME	APP	FIRST NAME	MIDDLE NAME	BIRTHDATE	T	E	GR.	SEC.

BUS NO	DATE ENTERED (MO DAY YR)	DATE WITHDRAWN MO DAY YR)	DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS ATTENDANCE CALENDAR CARD	HOME ROOM TEACHER

STUDENT'S ADDRESS (STREET NO) (CITY) (STATE) (ZIP)	PARENT OR GUARDIAN	PHONE

AUGUST				
29	30	31		
SEPTEMBER				
			1	2
	6	7		9
12	13	14	15	16
19	20	21	22	23
26	27	28	29	30
OCTOBER				
3	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	
17	18	19	20	21
24	25	26	27	28
31				
NOVEMBER				
	1	2	3	

NOVEMBER				
7	8	9	10	
14	15	16	17	18
21	22	23		
28	29	30		
DECEMBER				
			1	2
5	6	7	8	9
12	13	14	15	16
JANUARY				
	3	4	5	6
9	10	11	12	13
	17	18	19	20
23	24	25		

JANUARY				
			26	
30	31			
FEBRUARY				
		1	2	3
6	7	8	9	10
13	14	15	16	17
	21	22	23	24
27	28	29		
MARCH				
			1	2
5	6	7	8	9
12	13	14	15	16
19	20	21	22	23
26	27	28	29	30

APRIL				
9	10	11	12	13
16	17	18	19	
23	24	25	26	27
30				
MAY				
	1	2	3	4
7	8	9	10	11
14	15	16	17	18
21	22	23	24	25
	29	30	31	
JUNE				
				1
4	5	6	7	8
11	12	13		

1983-84

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Table (Pre-Post) Results

Table 1

Pre-Treatment: October - February

Number of Absences

February - 9 students

5 or more absences

January - 9 students

5 or more absences

December - 7 students

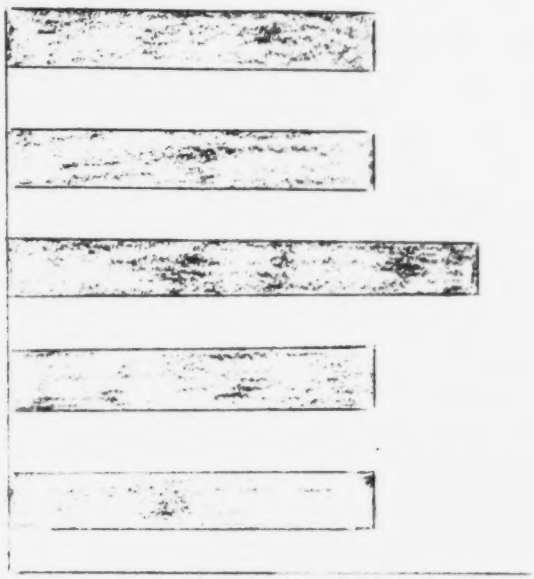
5 or more absences

November - 5 students

5 or more absences

October - 8 students

5 or more absences



A B C D F

Grades (Average for Returned Absentees)

Table 2

Post-Treatment: March - May

Number of Absences

May - 2 students

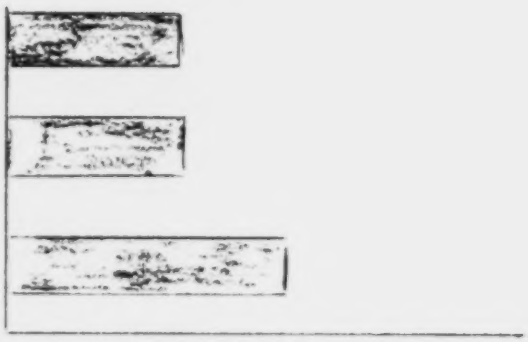
5 or more absences

April - 1 student

5 or more absences

March - 2 students

5 or more absences



Grades (Average for Returned Absentees)